

gun show loophole. Congress has failed to make the necessary improvements to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System that could significantly decrease the likelihood of convicted criminals gaining access to guns. And, the President has failed to provide the necessary leadership. Instead we have seen a continual rise in the levels of gun related crime. This increase in crime levels has not been restricted to America's largest cities, but has also permeated America's small and mid-sized cities. As Paul Helmke, president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and former mayor of Fort Wayne, IN, describes it:

For almost six years, many have systematically made it easier for criminals to have access to firearms by weakening enforcement of laws that cut illegal gun trafficking, supporting policies that encourage more firearms on the streets of American cities, putting AK-47s and other military-style semiautomatic weapons back onto our streets and even placing huge restraints on the ability of governments and individuals to hold the gun pushers accountable through the civil court system.

The 110th Congress has a fresh opportunity to act on a bipartisan basis to pass legislation that will make our streets safer for all Americans. I urge my colleagues to work to enact sensible gun safety legislation for the benefit of our families, communities and police officers.

CREATION OF A U.S. AFRICA COMMAND

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, as the Defense Department continues its planning for the creation of an Africa Command, it is important to realize that the creation of a new regional combatant command focused exclusively on Africa will have a profound impact on our country's presence, policies, and engagement in what is becoming one of the most critical regions of the world. New bases, new personnel, new missions, new efforts, and new relationships will be created, and our potential to have a positive impact throughout the continent will be enhanced greatly.

We have to be strategic and forward-thinking as we create this new organization, though. Because we are making such a profound change to our posture on the continent, we need to ensure that the new organization will contribute to, not define, the U.S. Government's overall strategy and objectives for the continent. We also need to make sure that the U.S. military's activities and involvement on the continent do not overshadow, skew, or otherwise hinder our Government's other key objectives.

It is clear that challenges in Africa are diverse and complex. We have a number of security-related concerns there, ranging from terrorist organizations and safe havens to large-scale corruption, regional conflicts, and the disruption of global energy markets. Continuing to establishing firm and productive military-to-military rela-

tions with a number of African nations is also critical.

But we have learned that the way to address the underlying causes of the security challenges throughout the continent is not generally through military power. In fact, the best way to address the full range of security-related concerns in Africa is to focus on the underlying conditions that plague governments and societies throughout the continent. Security threats and instability stem from corruption, absence of human rights, poverty, disease, lagging economies, and joblessness. Weak governments are incapable of addressing the dynamics that often contribute to lawlessness or violence, and are often left without any capacity to help defeat trans-national threats.

Our focus as a government, therefore, must be on strengthening African governance capacities and legitimacy, as well as the commitment to the rule of law, sound democratic mechanisms, and human rights. We must continue to help alleviate the humanitarian suffering that exists throughout the continent, and we must work hard to assist African countries develop sound democratic institutions that are credible and capable, and that have the technical capacity to provide for their people and to govern fairly. Only then will we start to see real returns—real, long-term returns—for our national security.

This isn't to suggest that continued military involvement throughout the continent isn't essential. It is. But only if it is a component of a broader strategy to address these underlying causes of instability. U.S. military activities throughout Africa must help support a larger framework that seeks to strengthen African governments and balance the need for good governance and security capacity. Our security assistance to African nations, and more broadly, the work of the U.S. military throughout Africa, must not interfere with, create an imbalance in, or skew the necessary political, economic, and social work that must be done if we are going to see any long-term improvement in areas of critical concern.

Accordingly, establishing a new combatant command for Africa presents an opportunity to strengthen our national security focus in Africa, but it also presents an opportunity to create a military command with the primary mission of supporting diplomatic, development, humanitarian assistance, and regional initiatives led by the Department of State, USAID, and other agencies. This command, if designed right, will be able to serve as a contributor to broader U.S. Government efforts throughout the continent, and will help provide an additional platform for regional thinking, strategizing, and activity that will advance the strategic interests of our country throughout Africa.

To be effective, of course, this command will take careful planning. It will also take a considerable amount of

planning on the part of the Department of State, USAID, and other departments and agencies that will have to adjust to this new organization. It will take intensive coordination and adjustments throughout the civilian inter-agency and it will be crucial that State, USAID, and other departments and agencies are playing a full role in the creation of this command.

The mission of this command will need to be relatively broad. Africa Command should establish strong security-oriented relationships with our partner nations throughout Africa. These relationships should be coordinated with our embassies and with Washington, but should only be part of our broader efforts with any given country. The command's efforts should be balanced and should take into consideration the scale and scope of diplomatic, development, humanitarian, and human rights efforts in each country.

The command should also prepare to deal with international organizations—particularly the African Union and subregional organizations that often play leading roles in regional and continental peacekeeping efforts, conflict mitigation activities, and humanitarian response. Establishing a strong relationship with the AU and other organizations will be essential to unlocking the potential for Africans to address security challenges throughout their continent.

The command should also prepare to conduct missions that have often taken a backseat to higher profile or less military-focused efforts. Humanitarian assistance—often one of the best ways to win hearts and minds in the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster or conflict—will need to be at the top of the command's list of priorities. So too should efforts to help rebuild societies after conflict. This might take the form of logistical assistance for humanitarian or development personnel, or potentially a direct role for U.S. military personnel, when appropriate. Other critical components of the new command's mission should include anticorruption efforts, leadership training, strengthening civilian oversight of national militaries, preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, demobilizing or reintegrating ex-combatants, and being on standby for rapid response to new conflicts or challenges.

The Department of Defense does a lot of this already. Many of these missions have been carried out by dedicated men and women in uniform who are stationed in places like Nigeria, Uganda, or at the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa. The challenge, though, is to establish a command that places these initiatives on its priority list, and to ensure that these efforts are resourced appropriately, are coordinated with the appropriate departments and agencies, and that they do not distort or disrupt other key initiatives throughout the continent.

With this new mission and these challenges in mind, I would like to

raise a series of issues that I believe to be important as our government begins developing this new command.

First, as the Department of Defense plans for the creation of an Africa Command, it is essential that it think outside of the traditional model of the regional combatant command. While this new command will help us defeat terrorist networks that operate, recruit, stage, or otherwise seek haven throughout the continent of Africa, this new command should not have combat as its primary mission. It should have as its core mission the task of supporting bilateral, regional, and continental diplomatic and development efforts. It also should be focused on bolstering State, USAID, and other government activities—providing resources, information, and logistical support for programs that have often been slowed or stopped because of the very absence of these things.

Second, the creation of an Africa Command and the design of its mission, objectives, and capacity, must be done in concert with the Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and other departments and agencies that are active in Africa. This new organization—the first regional command to be focused exclusively on Africa—will obviously be military in nature, but it must cast a new mold for regional combatant commands that incorporates interagency interests and responsibilities from the outset, as well as personnel from throughout the government that can help advance the mission of the U.S. Government in Africa. The Department of State and USAID personnel should be embedded deeply into the command and should play important leadership roles in the various components of this command. Formal coordination mechanisms, too, must be established between the new command, our embassies, Washington, and other pertinent regional and functional commands around the world.

Given its potential impact throughout the continent, we should make every effort to ensure that the command represents a unified U.S. Government effort, and that in the early planning phases of this command that civilian interagency requirements are absorbed and incorporated into the final organization.

Third, and more specifically, the planning process for the creation of an Africa Command must be met with parallel—and equally aggressive—discussions within the Department of State. The Department of State must realize that an Africa Command will have a significant impact on how it does its business and how it coordinates and collaborates with the Defense Department. It should begin planning for internal bureaucratic changes, as well as posture changes throughout the continent, to account for the fact that the Defense Department's presence and focus will be regional, while the Department of State's efforts will remain largely bilateral.

Africa Command will help alleviate many coordinate challenges between departments that have existed to date. But it won't change the fact that the State Department still focuses on bilateral relationships and often has trouble organizing, coordinating, or planning for regional initiatives or programs. Closer State-DOD relations will come about as a result of the creation of Africa Command if and when the State Department begins addressing how it can better organize itself to address regional conflicts, transnational counterterrorism efforts, humanitarian emergencies that spill over borders, and ungoverned spaces.

We must also recognize the resource disparity between the Defense Department and the Department of State. This will most likely be an important issue as this new command is created. But short of dramatically increasing the State Department's budget in the next few years to account for an additional and needed focus on Africa, it will be essential that the State Department maintain a leadership role throughout this entire process, and that it adjusts itself to better manage and coordinate all U.S. government efforts throughout the continent. The State Department should apply its best Africa and political-military minds to DOD's efforts to create this new command, and it should view its role as both client and patron, knowing well that the creation of this new command will require new leadership efforts within the State Department.

Fourth, it is crucial that the Defense Department and the State Department move faster to establish joint planning mechanisms—both strategic and financial. It has become widely known that Defense and State planning mechanisms are not in sync, and that both organizations plan, or don't plan, for events, missions, and strategic objectives differently. This needs to be addressed immediately. The creation of Africa Command will give both departments an opportunity to begin syncing planning capabilities, and may open the window to truly interagency budgeting and strategic planning processes that will align all U.S. Government resources to address challenges in places like Africa.

This may sound bureaucratic, but it has real implications on how we position our government to address the wide-ranging challenges throughout Africa, and indeed throughout the rest of the world. The State Department develops bilateral strategic plans and generates resource requirements largely based on bilateral, and sometimes multilateral efforts. The Defense Department views things more regionally, establishing regional commands and task forces that can evaluate, strategize, and implement programs based on the needs or challenges unique to a given region—challenges that often transcend national borders or programming allocations. Neither department's strategic planning proc-

ess is perfect, but I would urge both Departments—in addition to USAID, the Department of Treasury, Justice, Agriculture, as well as others—to begin evaluating how the strategic planning process can incorporate departmental or agency-specific activities and efforts into comprehensive U.S. Government strategies for the continent, subregions, and partner nations. Creating combined planning processes would also benefit lawmakers that are constantly seeking better coordination and a higher return on taxpayer investments.

Fifth, and in a related vein, the President should make absolutely clear that ambassadors—chiefs of mission in any given country—are his representatives and must be accountable and responsible for all actions taken on behalf of the U.S. Government in any given country. It is essential that ambassadors have the ultimate say of what happens in country, and that he or she has the ability to “turn off” any programs, initiatives, or efforts that may adversely affect our government's broader goals in or relationship with a given country. That said, the Department of State may want to consider creating a new position for Africa that can help liaise—at a sufficiently senior level—with the senior Africa Command commander on daily issues. This position would be more than a political advisor. This person would ideally have the ability to make decisions at the traditional three- or four-star level, and provide a substantive and management-oriented perspective on State and DOD efforts throughout the continent. This person would ideally not be based in Washington, and might benefit from serving side-by-side with the new combatant commander.

The Department of State—both in Washington and at our embassies—must step up and play a stronger leadership role. I would imagine that DOD would welcome this. In many countries in Africa the Defense Department represents the bulk of U.S. efforts or presence. Our security assistance programs are wide-ranging and often overshadow development, economic, or political assistance to fragile and poor countries. This is not to suggest that the creation of a new command for Africa is bad. It is not. I authored a successful piece of legislation last year that required the Defense Department to do a complete feasibility study on this very issue. I believe that it will enhance our ability to do important work throughout Africa, and that it will have a positive impact on our national security. But it is essential that as we increase our efforts to strengthen the security capabilities of our partners in Africa, we do not undermine critical human rights and that we work to strengthen democratic institutions. The State Department must prepare to exert its authority and influence on the new command's activities and ensure that future U.S. Government efforts in Africa are balanced and take into consideration the larger strategic efforts in any

given country, region, and throughout the continent.

Finally, the Congress needs to be prepared to support this new effort. It will be essential that Congress take into account the needs of the Defense Department and the individual uniformed services as this new command is created. But it is equally essential that Congress take into account the needs of the State Department, USAID, and other agencies that are trying to ramp up their efforts throughout the continent. If anything, the creation of a new combatant command for Africa should signal the dramatically increasing importance of Africa to our national security, and that to truly address the range of challenges present there we need to look at an equally aggressive plan to strengthen our diplomatic, development, humanitarian, and human rights work throughout the continent. This may include addressing how the Congress allocates funds—both to this new command and to the other departments and agencies that will make the spirit and intent of this command work.

In closing, we must focus greater resources on Africa but we should ensure that our efforts in Africa do not become primarily military in nature, and that the State Department continues to play the primary leadership role with respect to our efforts on the continent. Those within the Defense Department, the State Department, at USAID and other key departments and agencies will need to use this as an opportunity to evaluate and enhance the way they do business. The success of this governmental effort requires it, and our national security depends on it.

COAL TO LIQUIDS FUEL PRODUCTION ACT

Mr. OBAMA. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my distinguished colleague, the Senator from Kentucky, Mr. BUNNING, in introducing this important legislation.

The geologic deposit known as Illinois Basin Coal—which lies beneath Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky—has more untapped energy potential than the combined oil reserves of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. This coal deposit underlies more than 65 percent of the surface of the State of Illinois, with recoverable reserves estimated to be in excess of 38 billion tons from my State alone. Moreover, with just a glance at a map of Illinois, one can see that my State is dotted with towns that reflect our 200-year coal mining history—towns with names like Carbondale, Energy, Carbon Hill, Coal City, and Zeigler.

In some parts of Illinois, however, these names are just shadows of the past. More than 15 years ago, upon the enactment of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, coal mining in Illinois was drastically transformed. Given the high sulfur content of Illi-

nois coal, many users switched from Illinois coal to other, lower sulfur coals mined out West. As a result, thousands of Illinois jobs vanished, and with it, the life force of many of these towns. Air quality throughout the Nation improved drastically, but vast energy resources were rendered idle, awaiting new future technologies.

Today, we are exploring those new technologies, which promise a renaissance for coal communities. Two east central Illinois towns, for example, are under consideration for the billion-dollar FutureGen project, which many of my colleagues know will be the first near zero-emissions coal-fired powerplant in the world.

But coal from the Illinois Basin, with its high energy content, is a superb feedstock not just for power generation, as promised by FutureGen, but also for the manufacture of Fischer-Tropsch—FT—fuel. Created in the 1920s by German scientists and used during World War II, the FT process is the major fuel source for vehicles in South Africa. In both nations, the production of diesels from coal was developed as a response to petroleum embargoes against those nations at various points in their history.

Meanwhile, in the United States, more than 55 percent of our fuel consumption continues to come from foreign oil, and that number is growing. Our economy is exposed to potential jeopardy from oil supply disruptions and price shocks. We must diversify our fuel supply, and that means all domestic options should be on the table for consideration.

Fischer-Tropsch fuel is interchangeable with standard diesel, functioning in existing engines with little or no modification. FT fuels can be transported in our existing fuel distribution infrastructure. Moreover, FT fuels have far lower emissions than standard diesel. The Department of Defense, the largest consumer of petroleum in the United States, has great interest in acquiring this fuel. But Fischer-Tropsch is not manufactured in the U.S., and no focused federal initiatives exist to encourage the development of a Fischer-Tropsch manufacturing base.

The bill introduced by Senator BUNNING and myself will provide that Federal focus. This bill will help to create a new market for abandoned and abundant Illinois Basin coal, revitalizing economic development and jobs in the coal communities of our States. It will help develop the capital infrastructure for producing FT fuels at the levels necessary for preliminary testing by the Department of Defense and for the private sector. It will explore carbon sequestration for this technology before we can pursue construction. And it will play a key role in reducing our Nation's dependence on foreign oil.

I know that there are no perfect answers in the pursuit of energy independence. There is no single fuel or feedstock that offers affordability, reliability, transportability, and sensi-

tivity to the environment in equal ways. But, as we pursue the best course of action for our energy independence, we cannot delay action until we reach the perfect solution. Maintaining our dependency on unstable regions of the world for the fuel that we cannot live without is far too great a risk. Actions taken today must be accompanied by rigorous concurrent debate in preparation for the second and third generation choices of our alternative fuel infrastructure.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

60TH BIRTHDAY OF THE NORTH DAKOTA AIR NATIONAL GUARD

• Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, January 16, 2007, is a special day for North Dakota.

It is the 60th birthday of the North Dakota Air National Guard. It will also mark a major milestone in the history of the North Dakota Air National Guard. On that day the 119th Fighter Wing will conduct a ceremony honoring the final flight of their F-16s, closing out an illustrious history of flying fighter aircraft in defense of our country.

On that day, the 119th Fighter Wing will also introduce the public to its two new missions, operating Predator unmanned aerial systems and flying light transport aircraft.

The North Dakota Air National Guard began on January 16, 1947. The first Air Guard squadron organized in North Dakota was the 178th Fighter Squadron in Fargo. The first meetings were held in the Army National Guard Armory in downtown Fargo but the squadron moved to Hector Airport by the end of the year.

Duane Larson was the squadron commander during the 1950s. He was nicknamed "Pappy" because he was the senior fighter pilot. The squadron started calling themselves Pappy Larson and his Happy Hooligans after an old comic strip. The squadron has been called the Happy Hooligans ever since.

The Happy Hooligans began operations with the P-51D Mustang. They flew the Mustang until 1954. After that they flew F-94s, F-89s, F-102s, F-101B Voodoos and F-4D Phantoms. Since 1990, they have flown F-16s.

On April 1, 1951, the Hooligans were mobilized for Federal service and ordered to active duty during the Korean conflict. When they were demobilized in 1954, they were put on alert to defend against an attack by the Soviet Union. At first, the alert consisted of aircraft on the main ramp of Hector Field with aircrew sleeping in a nearby building on base.

The alert mission was supposed to be a temporary mission for the Happy Hooligans. It was only supposed to last